

Christina senior secretary named Delaware's first Educational Support Professional of the Year

A senior administrative secretary from Christina School District's Jennie E. Smith Elementary School is the state's first Delaware Educational Support Professional of the Year.

Secretary of Education Susan Bunting surprised Alice Williams by presenting her with the award at her school this morning. Williams, who has 24 years of experience including eight with the state, originally planned to become a teacher. Instead, life eventually brought her into a position working as a secretary in a high poverty school in Wilmington.

"It was here that I learned to look past the first impressions of each family and to attempt to remove the obstacles that prevent student success," Williams said.

"I have witnessed hidden and overt criticism of parents when students are unprepared for school or when the adults appear unsupportive. I quickly learned that hygiene issues can be the result of transient living situations, unavailable washers or dryers or non-working utilities. Parents or guardians may not be able to produce the necessary documents to register their child for school because they're behind in paying the utility bills that are required to verify the address or have utilities in the name of another person due to past balance. A

parent who uses public transportation will take hours to come pick up a sick child or may have to walk if they don't have bus fare," Williams said. "My experience has helped me recognize the balancing act that parents have between their job and family responsibilities. Sending a parent away and asking them to come back to school with the required documents can force a choice between keeping their job or not registering their child for school."

Williams said she learned the state requirements and policies and found ways to be flexible with parents: "Doing so ultimately puts the child first, which is always the goal."

Jennie E. Smith Elementary Assistant Principal Mabel Boutte said Williams has an unwavering commitment to her school and greater community.

"Our school has an influx of new residents as a result of population growth in our area. Many times, our new families have difficulty navigating the new surroundings. Mrs. Williams has made it her mission to ensure they have a smooth transition to our school and its surrounding community," Boutte said. "She quickly discerns their needs and works diligently to provide clarification to ensure they have a great first impression of the Christina School District."

Bunting congratulated Williams, thanking her for her outstanding support of students, families and staff that led to her recognition.

"Mrs. Williams serves as a vital bridge between the school and community. Her dedication to the people she serves helps families and students feel welcomed and staff feel supported. Work such as hers often is behind the scenes but is so vital to our students' success," Bunting said.

Christina Superintendent Dan Shelton said, "Watching Alice interact with the students at Jennie E. Smith Elementary is a true delight. Her upbeat nature and true desire to help our students and families is evident in everything she does. Having Alice as the first face of the school sets the tone for a positive experience for all who enter the school."

Williams is one of 20 educational support professionals honored this year. Each was chosen to represent their districts or the Delaware Charter School Network in the state's first Delaware Educational Support Professional of the Year Program.

Launching this year, the Delaware State Educational Support Professional of the Year (ESPY) program recognizes outstanding service by school employees who provide direct or indirect services to students and their families. The Delaware Charter School Network also is invited to participate. Employees considered for the award include:

- Paraprofessionals
- Custodial staff
- Secretaries
- Nutritional staff
- School- and district-employed bus drivers
- School- and district-employed bus aides

From those nominated at a building level, one educational support professional of the year moves forward to represent each district or the charter school community in the state program. Each district/charter network winner receives a \$1,000 personal award from the winner's district or charter school. The state program then chooses one person annually to serve as Delaware's Educational Support Professional of the Year. State winners receive an additional \$1,500 personal award from DD0E as well as \$2,500 to be used for the educational benefit of his or her students.

A selection committee reviewed the local winners' state applications to select the 2021 Delaware Educational Support Professional of the Year.

DD0E is excited to recognize Williams and all of these outstanding professionals whose work is vital to students' success.

The 20 nominees are:

Appoquinimink: Middletown High paraprofessional Valerie Raab (awarded posthumously)

Brandywine: P.S. duPont Middle paraprofessional Ryan Matthews

Caesar Rodney: W.B. Simpson Elementary paraprofessional Paula

Kohout

Cape Henlopen: Richard Shields Elementary paraprofessional
Chantal Smith

Capital: William Henry Middle School paraprofessional Jamel
Trott

Delaware Charter School Network: Charter School of Wilmington
Assistant to the President/Admissions Director Suzanne
Musacchio

Christina: Jennie E. Smith Elementary senior administrative
secretary Alice Williams

Colonial: Southern Elementary paraprofessional Holly
Wiedenmann

Delmar: Delmar High School Intensive Learning Center assistant
Odell Jones Jr.

Indian River: Indian River High IT technician David Clark

Lake Forest: Lake Forest North Elementary Child Nutrition
Services Manager Karen Mast

Laurel: Laurel High School custodian Justin Saulsbury

Milford: Lulu Ross Elementary paraprofessional Robert Newsome

NCCVT: Hodgson Vo-Tech paraprofessional Megan McClelland

POLYTECH: POLYECH High Technician Plant Operator& Maintenance
James Demko

Red Clay Consolidated: A.I. duPont High paraprofessional
Kathryn Ellis

Seaford: Central Elementary school behavioral interventionist
LuAnn Holden

Smyrna: North Smyrna Elementary paraprofessional Nadine
Collins

Sussex Tech: Sussex Tech High School Technology Coordinator
Philip Wilson

Woodbridge: Woodbridge Middle School chief custodian Thomas
"Pete" Faulk

Find photos of the nominees and learn more about the program [here](#).